

Pearl Jam slams the Mid-South

By MARK WIACEK
Attitude

MEMPHIS — Before Pearl Jam's Mid-South Coliseum concert, I wasn't expecting a whole lot in the way of a performance from the kings of grunge.

In Pearl Jam's last couple of appearances on MTV, the band looked as if they were being forced to play, while front man Eddie Vedder reluctantly stood hunched over a microphone, arms crossed and muttering words that he tried to call lyrics. On Friday night in Memphis though, Pearl Jam performed as they did in their live videos for "Even Flow" and "Alive" — wild, animated and loud!

Opening alternative/metal act Kings X were greeted by a sea of flannel shirts, backward hats and Pearl Jam concert T's that spread the length of the coliseum. In 45 minutes, they ripped through such songs as "Pretend" and "Dog Man," which instantly sent the crowd in the pit into a slam-dancing frenzy. Bodies and shirts were flying everywhere, but this was just a taste of things yet to come.

Forty-five minutes after Kings X's last song the coliseum was thrown into darkness, except for a purple light from the back drop. Pearl Jam kicked off their set with "Release," one of their slowest songs that showcases Eddie Vedder's wide vocal ability. Vedder's singing was so flawless you couldn't tell if he was singing live until the stage was lit up at the chorus. The band then rushed into an intense version of "GO," followed by a sped-up version of "Animal."

From the moment of the opening chord of "GO," it seemed as if the people in the pit were out to destroy one another as they slammed and jumped in unity. The band was as charged up as the audience with guitar players Mike McCready and Stone Gossard dancing and executing their riffs perfectly. The bassist, Jeff Ament, threw himself around so much it's amazing he didn't break something.

Pearl Jam kept up the pace, never giving the slam dancers a chance to rest with songs "Deep," "Jeremy" and "Glorified G." They slowed things down again with two very serious songs: "Daughter," which deals with rape, and "W.M.A.," talking about police brutality.

Up until this point, Vedder's singing was great, but he pretty much remained motionless in front of the microphone until the end of "W.M.A." Then, he started to circle the stage like a caged lion. He eyed the microphone as if it were his prey, and in one quick second sprung upon it for a brutal version of "Even Flow."

From that point on, Vedder and the audience experienced a burst of energy as



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Grunge band Pearl Jam performed Friday in Memphis.

they charged into songs "Dissident" "Black" and "Alive."

Pearl Jam ended the show with "Leash," during which band members crashed into one another, wearing themselves out. They came back out after "Leash" and played an encore of "Rearviewmirror" and a new song called "Not For You."

"Rearviewmirror" was probably the highlight of the whole show. On it, Vedder strapped on a guitar, sang and trashed out the riff with the rest of the band.

Pearl Jam closed things up with Vedder telling the sold-out audience that "We hadn't been to Memphis before. We came here with an open mind, and we found out there is more here than Elvis!" Which hopefully is an indication that they will be back through Memphis on their next tour.

I didn't think it was possible, but Pearl Jam is one of those bands who actually are better live than on record. Sure the music is about the same, but Vedder's lyrics are much more passionate and the band's stage presence is incredible.

Pearl Jam is supposed to be coming through Nashville and when they do, do whatever it takes to get tickets. If you like Pearl Jam even a little bit, then you can't afford to miss them.

Mark Wiacek is a senior at North Side High School.